

**THEODORE A. MCGRAW**

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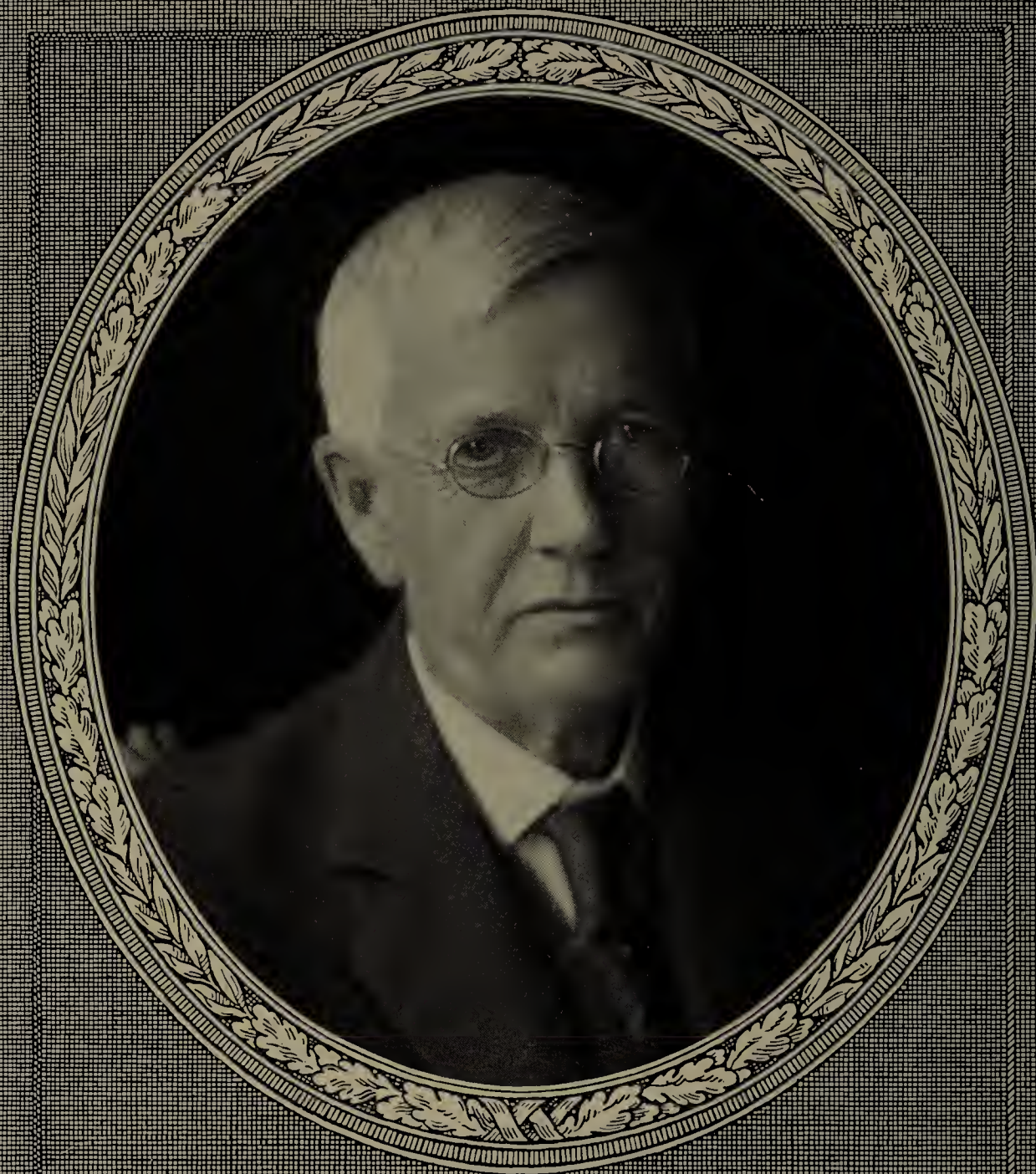
*Reprint from*  
***SURGERY, GYNECOLOGY AND OBSTETRICS***  
***August, 1929, pages 237-239***

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1839-1921



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THEODORE ANDREWS MCGRAW was born in Detroit in 1839, the son of Alexander C. and Susanna Walker McGraw. His early education was received in the private school of Mr. Bacon and the public schools of Detroit until 1858 when he entered the University of Michigan. There were, at that time, no high schools and the universities and colleges were, in his words, "indifferent high schools masquerading under more inspiring names." He found in the University a feature then unique in American schools, a chemical laboratory for students and he afterwards said: "I have always regarded it as one of the happiest events of my life that when a student in the University I was influenced by Professor Douglas to enter his laboratory for practical instruction." Undoubtedly his scientific interest was initiated here. He received the degree of bachelor of arts in 1859 and with intention of becoming a lawyer went to Germany in the autumn to begin his studies of jurisprudence in the University of Bonn.

Here he became acquainted with the professor in anatomy and, because of this contact, he began the study of anatomy. His keen interest in this caused him to forsake the law and begin the study of medicine. After two semesters in Bonn he went to Berlin where he continued his studies until 1862. In the meanwhile, the Civil War having broken out, he returned home to support the cause of the North.

Convinced of the advisability of completing his medical studies before enlisting, he entered the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York and secured the degree of doctor of medicine in 1863. He was shocked at the laxity of method and requirement in the American schools as contrasted with his experience in Germany.

Securing a position as contract surgeon in the Army, he was stationed at Jefferson Barracks in Missouri where one gathers that he was disappointed by the routine character of the work and in three months he entered active service as assistant surgeon with the rank of first lieutenant. From this time until the end of the war his service was active and stirring. First in charge of a surgical ward in the hospital in Chattanooga, then of a smallpox hospital from which he viewed the Battle of Lookout Mountain; later, on the staff of General J. H. Wilson he rode with him on a raid through Alabama. Left behind to care for some wounded, he was captured by General Forrest but was soon released on parole. The war

ending, he left the Army returning to Detroit to take up the practice of his profession.

He thus started with a superb equipment, a technical and scientific training far better than usual, and with the initiative and confidence acquired by his varied military experience. Dr. McGraw's work in Germany had made him profoundly dissatisfied with American medical schools and in 1869 he, with others, founded the Detroit College of Medicine as a summer school. In 1871 he was invited to the chair of surgery in the University of Michigan which he occupied for one session. Here he found conditions similar to those existing in New York, with the exception of the laboratory work in chemistry. He had enough material for a weekly clinic but no hospital facilities. The endeavors of the faculty to make any change in this regard met with such determined opposition from the politicians that Dr. McGraw devoted his entire attention to the Detroit College of Medicine where he was professor of surgery until he retired. After the reorganization of this school in 1885 he became president and dean holding these positions until his retirement in 1915. In speaking of the impulses that led to these activities he says: "I had discovered in my two years of army activities that I was deficient in that exact knowledge of anatomy that was essential to good surgery. The advent of antiseptic and aseptic surgery, besides, had opened a new field for operative work, that of the abdomen, which demanded a study of anatomical relations, which had never been taught in the schools. . . . It seemed to me to be imperative, if I were to advance in my profession, that I should have facilities for dissections and other work that can be found only in a medical school."

He thus had the desire for self-improvement, to experiment and to teach, and to fulfil this desire he founded a medical school. From the first he was a voluminous writer and one cannot find a volume of the old medical journals as the *Peninsular Journal of Medicine* or *The Physician and Surgeon* without many case reports, clinical papers, and experimental observations from his pen.

He soon became a national figure because of his pioneer work in abdominal surgery, particularly intestinal anastomosis. In 1891, Dr. McGraw delivered the chairman's address before the section on surgery and anatomy of the American Medical Association upon "The Use of the Elastic Ligature in the Surgery of the Intestines" and his reputation became international. This work was no happy chance but was the result of several years of painstaking experimental work carried on with his assistants Hickey, Ives, Ireland, and Warren.

His writings show a wide acquaintance with scientific literature and a protean interest in surgery. Hardly a subject of surgery but what was illuminated by him, especially one notes his interest in cancer and intestinal obstruction. As an instance of his daring pioneer surgery, one recalls that he performed in 1882 one of the early thyroidectomies in this country. The patient afterward developed myxœdema which was a source of much chagrin to Dr. McGraw.



His success in teaching is attested by the large number of able men who secured their early training and enthusiasm at his hands and by the almost idolatrous worship they had for him. He always preached longer and more careful training for surgeons and condemned the attempt to operate without sufficient training and education. This attitude is best expressed in his own words: "Modern methods of surgery admit of such radical procedures that the young surgeon is inclined to lose respect for the human body. He thinks he can cut at will and produce sweeping cures immediately. . . . Special equipment should be required of the surgeon. The young graduate in medicine should not be permitted to exercise his zeal for operating until he has perfected himself through older men. I believe a law calling for a special degree would be of value."

In person, plainly but immaculately dressed, dignified and at times austere, but in his personal relations kindly and modest almost to a fault, he was ever sympathetic with the weak but quick to rebuke a wrong. Quiet reigned immediately on his entrance to a lecture room or clinic, and attention born of admiration and respect deepening, in the older students, into affection and love was probably the most notable feature of this association. To those who knew him well it was interesting to note the reaction of the occasional visitor or of one visiting his operative clinic for the first time. After the introductory remarks which always covered with a unique clarity the subject in hand, on picking up the scalpel his hand was seized with a tremor so marked that all unacquainted with him were concerned until the moment the blade came in contact with the operative field, when the firm and steady stroke dispelled the momentary doubt. His operating was marked by care and attention to detail quite in contrast to the spectacular and oftentimes brilliant workers of his time. Lack of consideration of a patient, or an apathetic or slovenly disposal of a case was certain to receive its well merited rebuke. With patients and colleagues alike he was ever the Christian gentleman, ready to give all he had of time, skill, and sympathy.

Following his retirement from active practice and teaching in 1915 he continued a lively interest in surgical literature and progress until his death in 1921 at the age of 82. No one can estimate the amount of good he did surgery by his honesty, inspiration, example, and scientific industry.







